

## **IDAHO SPOKESMAN REVIEW**

### **Science test scores show little improvement**

Ben Feller  
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WASHINGTON – For a nation seeking a rocket boost in science achievement, a new report card doesn't offer much lift: Only elementary school students' test scores are on the rise.

Students in middle and high school have not shown any improvement in science over the past five years, according to results from a federal test considered the benchmark of academic progress.

President Bush, Congress, corporate executives and top researchers have been trying to create a sense of urgency over science. The disappointing scores may boost their case.

Fourth-grade students posted small gains since the federal test was last given in 2000, mostly through improvement by the lowest-performing children, scores released Wednesday show.

The progress was interpreted by education officials as a sign that greater attention to elementary students' math and reading skills – as demanded by the No Child Left Behind law – may also be helping in science.

Yet the test found students in grades eight and 12 failed to improve at all since 2000 in their knowledge of earth, physical and life sciences.

The high school seniors actually did worse in science when compared with scores of a decade ago. Almost half of the 12th-graders taking the test in 2005 fell short of showing basic science skills.

"We need to get busy. And that starts with ensuring that all students have access to a strong science curriculum and the teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach science well," said Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust, which advocates for poor and minority children.

The science scores are from the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federal test given periodically on a range of topics. It is considered the best yardstick of how U.S. students perform over time and of how states stack up against each other.

In a positive step on a national priority, black and Hispanic students narrowed their achievement gaps with whites in fourth grade. So did poor students compared with richer ones.

That good news was limited. The racial and ethnic achievement gaps did not shrink in eighth grade, and the gap between blacks and whites only got bigger among 12th-graders.

Education Secretary Margaret Spellings said the results show why the No Child Left Behind law, which focuses on early and middle grades, should be expanded in high schools. The law requires testing in math and reading, with penalties for many schools that fail to improve.

State science testing under the law will begin in 2007-08, although schools will not face consequences for their performance – something Bush wants Congress to change.

Science skills have become critical in a huge range of blue-collar and white-collar jobs, and they form the foundation of engineering, technology, medicine and other leading fields.

The lackluster performance by older children underscores a deep concern among political and business executives, who see eroding science achievement as a threat to the U.S. economy.

Washington, Idaho students above average

» Fourth- and eighth-graders from Washington and Idaho scored higher than the national average on a nationwide science test.

» The average test score for Washington fourth-graders was 153 points, four points higher than the national average for that grade. Washington eighth-graders averaged 154 points, compared with the national average of 147 points.

» In Idaho, fourth-graders averaged 155 points, six points higher than the national average. Idaho eighth-graders scored 12 points higher than the national average.